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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 5783  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3494  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3358  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001301

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: AN APPARENT DECREASE IN THEFT

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11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: Theft is the second most common type of crime in Turkmenistan, drug crime being the most common. Although former President Niyazov sentenced many criminals, including the heads of criminal networks, to death in the early 90's, the occurrence of theft later increased as the rate of drug addiction began to climb. The most common types of theft in Turkmenistan are pickpocketing, shoplifting, and stealing jewelry. There have also been instances of burglary, armed robbery, and motor vehicle theft. According to several sources, theft has decreased in recent years. Many attribute the decrease to President Berdimuhamedov's refusal to grant pardons to those convicted of drug crimes. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) Theft is believed to be the second most common type of crime in Turkmenistan (after those involving illegal narcotics) since the break-up of the USSR. Although no official crime statistics are provided or published by the Turkmen government, a local police captain and Embassy contact told us that drugs and petty theft crimes are the most prevalent, and that among the latter, the most common are pickpocketing, shoplifting, home robberies, car stereos and the theft of jewelry. More serious crimes such as burglary, armed robbery, or motor vehicle thefts also occur, but much less frequently.

14. (SBU) The number of thefts in Turkmenistan went up towards the end of the Soviet Union and in the early 1990's. Within Turkmenistan, the northern city of Charjou (later renamed Turkmenabat) was believed to have one of the highest rates of crime in the Soviet Union, second only to Odessa, Ukraine. To combat the

trend, former President Niyazov in 1992 ordered the arrests of more than 100 criminal leaders, and several dozen were sentenced to death. Images of the dead bodies of the executed were broadcast on state television. Among those arrested was a well-known crime boss from Ashgabat's Hitrovka district, known by the name Aymurad. His crime network reportedly threatened the public and was behind many home break-ins, robberies, and motor vehicle thefts. As one Ashgabat resident put it, "In the late 80's, when Aymurad was around, everyone had to keep a stick in their bedrooms to defend ourselves in case bandits broke into the house at night. There were break-ins and car thefts reported every week. Even our apartment was burglarized and our neighbor's new Lada was stolen from his garage." After Aymurad and his associates were arrested and executed, the number of crimes in Turkmenistan reportedly went down significantly.

15. (SBU) Later, during the late 1990's, the rise in drug addiction was accompanied by an increase in petty theft, such as pick pocketing. Pickpocketing normally occurred in markets and on public transportation. Shoplifting was somewhat less popular among drug addicts, as stolen goods then had to be resold, whereas most addicts preferred crimes that yielded quick cash. Auto stereo thefts were popular as the equipment could easily be resold for a tenth of its value. (One local contact had his car broken into and stereo stolen twice in the same year). Car break-ins also often occurred to steal purses or car batteries, and tires were frequently stolen from

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vehicles.

16. (SBU) Another common type of theft in Turkmenistan is the stealing of jewelry, which can easily be converted into cash. Thieves normally rip the necklace or earrings from a female victim. (One woman reported that an addict attacked her right in front of her home in Ashgabat). This has been especially common at bus stops, where thieves approached unsuspecting victims from behind.

17. (SBU) After the convictions and executions of the crime bosses in 1992, car theft became rare, and most people now feel comfortable parking their cars on the street at night. According to an Interior Ministry official, there were only two car thefts during all of 2008. In both cases, reportedly committed by drug addicts, the car owners had left the car unlocked and the keys in the ignition. Armed robberies and burglaries are also uncommon now. The only recent known case of armed robbery occurred at a gas station in Geok Depe village in August 2008. There have been occasional reports of addicts robbing victims at knifepoint.

18. (SBU) Many attribute the decrease in theft during the past few years to President Berdimuhamedov's refusal to grant pardons to those convicted of drug crimes. As the number of addicts in communities has decreased, so has petty theft. As a Mary resident put it, "Two years ago, we couldn't leave even a shovel unattended in the yard or it would disappear right away. Drug addicts in our village would steal everything not nailed down. Now, however, there are hardly any thefts." Another Ashgabat resident noted that his neighborhood is much more peaceful now, and observed that addicts now prefer regular employment, such as washing cars or gardening, to support their drug habits. "They know that if they steal, they have no chance of being amnestied."

¶9. (SBU) COMMENT: Drug addicts in Turkmenistan are blamed not only for theft, but also for violent crimes such as murder and rape. Most Turkmen see the government's recent policy of refusing to pardon drug addicts before the completion of their prison sentences as the reason for lower crime rates in their communities. END COMMENT.

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